

September 14, 2006

The Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism Hearing Update

We are in the midst of an autism epidemic. Once a rare disorder, autism is now more prevalent than childhood cancer, juvenile diabetes, and Down Syndrome. We must establish best practices for supporting students and adults with autism. We also need to implement appropriate services widely.

Last year, I authored a bill to create the Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism. The Commission, which met for the first time yesterday, brings together some of the best minds to assist in focusing on policy and service infrastructure to meet the needs of people with autism and their families.

At yesterday's first hearing, Commission Chair Darrell Steinberg and Vice-Chair Dr. Barbara Firestone and 12 other Commissioners heard testimony from three panels: Scientific Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD); ASD Across the Lifespan: The Impact on Individuals and Families, and; Agencies and Programs for ASD. Family members, clinicians, researchers, advocates, agencies and providers shared powerful testimony.

The commissioners then used the input to outline their strategy for the coming year. They agreed to establish three task forces: early detection and treatment; identifying and closing the gaps for school-aged children; and planning for the services that are needed when young people with autism "age-out" of the school system. Commissioners also want to address the need for a public education campaign with cultural and linguistic components.

In the coming year, the Commission will develop and submit policy recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor. I look forward to their recommendations. For further information on the Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism please visit my website at: www.sen.ca.gov/perata.

As always, I value your input.

Sincerely

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